

Lucan turns into an *amor militiae* (ch. 5). C. thus establishes Love and Strife as useful and convincing tools for reading, analysing and (as far as possible) systematising Lucan's epic. While I—even after reading this book—shall continue to live on the wild side of Lucan studies, I found C.'s study particularly fruitful for illuminating Lucan's constant and surprisingly systematic dialogue with the *Aeneid*, a much observed and not sufficiently explored characteristic of our favourite maverick author. This feature will make this book useful set reading for any class on Latin epic—deconstructionist or not.

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ERICA M. BEXLEY, *SENECA'S CHARACTERS: FICTIONAL IDENTITIES AND IMPLIED HUMAN SELVES* (Cambridge classical studies). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. Pp. x + 388. ISBN 9781108477604. £90.00.

Erica Bexley's monograph stakes new ground in the study of Seneca's tragedies by returning to one of the basics of all drama — the characters of the play. But this is no stale return to Aristotle's *Poetics* or even T.S. Eliot's maxim: 'In the plays of Seneca, the drama is all in the word, and the word has no further reality behind it. His characters all seem to speak with the same voice, and at the top of it; they recite in turn' (*The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition, Volume 3* (2015), 196). On the contrary, B. expertly synthesises much of the recent scholarship on Senecan tragedy — from Bartsch and Star on Stoicism to Schiesaro and Littlewood on intertextuality and metatheater — but always with an eye to the literary creation of the characters and their reified 'life' as implied human beings. She strongly believes that character analysis has been underrepresented in much of Senecan scholarship, despite the vivid *dramatis personae* of the plays, and aims to correct that trend. The work consists of a short introduction that highlights her holistic approach to Seneca (i.e. she will take into consideration his philosophical works as well), four chapters on coherence, exemplarity, appearance and autonomy respectively, and concludes with a poignant afterword.

The first chapter focuses on the characters of Medea and Atreus and the way in which their consistent behaviour challenges many Stoic ideas about character and redefines tragic *anagnorisis*. Recognition scenes in *Medea* and *Thyestes* highlight how wickedness befits both Medea and Atreus and is part of their being 'in character'. When the internal (and external) audiences realise who Medea and Atreus actually *are*, one can observe that the interplay between these fictional creations and real human behaviour may blur. B. teases out how this could lend a Stoic colouring to both characters and, intriguingly, how possible comparisons with Roman comedy would add to the meaning of these scenes. Both Medea and Atreus enjoy looking at themselves as *exempla* and take additional mythological tales (e.g. Tereus and Procne in *Thyestes*) as paradigms for their actions. The second chapter discusses such *exempla* in more detail with *Troades* and *Hercules Furens* as the primary texts under the microscope. *Troades* features characters struggling to act like their fathers (both Pyrrhus and Astyanax) and B. underscores how such an inherited paradigm influences their actions and self-conception. There is a strait-jacket effect when paternal *exempla* such as Achilles and Hector loom over their sons and B. shows how their mindset and actions recall larger Roman ideas of exemplarity. Might there be something tragic in this? I believe more could be done investigating the female characters of the play from this angle, including the chorus (who seem to be well aware what 'Trojan Women' in tragedies are supposed to do), and Ulysses himself who has to summon 'all Ulysses' (*totum Ulixem*, 614) to uncover Andromache's subterfuge. In *Hercules Furens*, Hercules attempts self-*aemulatio* as well, but doing so leads to actions that could be considered tyrannical and dangerous for himself and his loved ones. In a subtle and convincing analysis, B. concludes that Lycus becomes the most important analogue for Hercules: 'this is the mirror in which Seneca reflects the danger of Hercules' detached, self-reflexive *exemplum*' (179).

The third chapter continues to probe the significance of character through their appearance. B. frames her argument by delving into ancient physiognomy and the way that

external physical appearance can indicate one's internal emotional or ethical state. In his prose and tragedies, Seneca is a master of physical descriptions (e.g. *de Ira* 1.1.3–5, *Phaed.* 362ff.), and B. considers the way his portrayal of Phaedra and Hippolytus 'articulate a complex relationship between exterior and interior manifestations of selfhood' (205). In fact, their inner psychological turmoil will end up destroying any beautiful *facies*, and B. finds that the body of Hippolytus becomes more of a textual artifact than human body — more a literary *corpus* than a literal corpse. The literary nature of the character of Oedipus concludes the chapter, where B. finds him, especially his body, an object of other's knowledge, and not a fully fleshed-out subject in his own right. If Oedipus seems trapped by his fate and only able to assert himself in his self-blinding, the question of his autonomy can be seen as vital for his character. Autonomy, through self-definition and self-assertion, is the subject of the final chapter and B. highlights how it plays out in three areas: freedom, revenge and suicide. For B., the isolated solipsism of Hippolytus may extend the Stoic idea of independence and other strong-willed Senecan protagonists may resemble the *sapiens*, however darkly. This is a strong chapter, and it allows B. to return to *Medea* and *Thyestes* and offer important concluding thoughts about these plays as revenge tragedies.

In conclusion, B.'s thorough scrutiny of the characters provides moments of startling truth and reflection, particularly when she considers them in tandem with Seneca's Stoic works. At times, however, I felt that the chapters could have benefited from 'zooming-out' to articulate what really was tragic about *Phaedra* or *Troades*, or how the missing sections of the play (chiefly, the choral odes) amplify or question the findings B. makes about the characters. Nevertheless, B. makes a compelling case for such character analysis in Senecan tragedy and her findings will be important for future study of these plays.

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JANJA SOLDÓ (ED.), *SENECA, EPISTULAE MORALES BOOK 2: A COMMENTARY WITH TEXT, TRANSLATION, AND INTRODUCTION*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021. Pp. xxxviii + 346, illus. ISBN 9780198854340. £120.00.

This large-scale commentary on Book 2 (letters 13–21) of Seneca's *Epistulae Morales (EM)* by Janja Soldo is a welcome addition to Senecan studies. It adds to the growing number of commentaries (listed xxxvii) on a whole book of his letters, rather than select letters from across the corpus. Thus S. builds on the growing recent interest in the letter-book, prose or verse, as a literary unit. The 'General Introduction' succinctly and judiciously covers Seneca's career, the date of *EM*, the addressee Lucilius, the question whether it is a genuine or fictional correspondence, the structure of *EM* and of Book 2, Seneca's relationship to earlier letter-writing, his language and terminology, the manuscript tradition, and the rationale of S.'s book.

The heart of the book is the commentary. Each letter receives an introduction summarising the letter's argument, tracing connections to adjacent letters, the rest of Book 2 and the whole collection; and the letter is set in its wider philosophical, literary and cultural context (e.g. the role of Epicureanism in the early letters is carefully examined; letter 15 is ably related to ancient discourse on, and practice of, physical and vocal exercise; it is shown how letter 18 has multiple links to the Saturnalia; and S. is admirably judicious on the recurring question of allusions to Nero in the letters — though his absence from the letters might have been contrasted with his appearance in the near-contemporary *QNat*). Then follows very full commentary, offering more detail on the topics covered in the letter's introduction, and much else. On terminology, S. carefully examines how Seneca shifts to and fro along the spectrum from technical philosophical jargon to ordinary language. There is much useful comment on style and language, though here S. can occasionally be less assured (e.g. 93 '*Non est itaque*: the adverb is not found in the third position before Seneca': it should be made clear that this applies only to that specific phrase, not '*itaque*' generally; 152 'There are no parallels for *in uita proficisci* meaning...'; but Seneca's '*profeceris*' is from '*proficere*'; 211 argues '*triduo et quatruiduo*' means 'for three and